

Steep Holm

Most members of the Severn Estuary Partnership will identify Steep Holm as “that hump of rock” rearing out of the sea half way between the English and Welsh coasts. How many realise that it supports rare flora and has a proven history stretching back well over 2,000 years? Archaeological work has discovered pre-historic flint tools; a unique Celtic carved stone head, and clear evidence of a Roman signal station being manned from the 2nd to at least the 4th century.

More recent major upheavals have included fortifying the island in the 1860's when it was feared that the French might invade this country. Nine of the original ten 7-ton cannons can still be seen in or near their emplacements, two of which are scheduled ancient monuments. In World War II four 6” coastal gun batteries were hastily built and mariners who ventured close enough to the cliffs might identify four 1940's searchlight posts, positioned to sweep the sea and silhouette any enemy shipping that dared to venture up the Channel.

The Kenneth Allsop Memorial Trust (registered charity) purchased Steep Holm in 1976 as a tribute to the pioneer conservationist and author, with the intention of continuing his ecological vision by managing the flora and fauna and maintaining the island as a wild place where man's intrusions are tolerated. Military relics are conserved – along with ruins of an early medieval priory, and 18th century fishermen's cottage, 19th century inn and farmhouse. The hub of activity for day visitors to the island is the substantial 187 Barracks, now transformed into a welcoming Visitor and Exhibition Centre where refreshments are served, picnics are eaten, books and souvenirs purchased, and cards posted home with unique Steep Holm stamps and franking. Research into history and the natural environment is ongoing with results being regularly published.

There is one great threat to the tranquillity and purpose of the Trust's vital tenure. If the proposed Cardiff – Western Severn barrage project is approved along its proposed line, the structure will pass within 100 meters of the North Cliffs, decimating the largest cormorant colony in the south west, and most of the island's ecology. Being on the turbulent side of a barrage would severely inhibit access for conservation work and research by Trust volunteers. Visitors would be unable to land and Steep Holm would revert to desolation.

More information needed? Please telephone the Trust Secretary – 01934 632307

Stan & Joan Rendell – Kenneth Allsop Memorial Trust



Happy Visitors by the Georgian Cannon mounted outside the Barracks